



# Loss and Grief for Kids In (and Out) of the Foster Care System

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Everything happens for a reason  
 I know how you feel  
 Good will come from this in time  
 Don't feel bad  
 Be strong  
 Stop crying  
 Keep busy  
 At least she/he's in a better place.  
 You're young. You can always have another child  
 Don't cry as it will upset your mother/father/sister/brother/etc.  
 It's what God wanted  
 Just move on  
 At least it wasn't what happened to me

3

You're lucky to be here  
 Well, you shouldn't miss them...they were horrible to you  
 I understand what you're dealing with  
 Don't feel sad...your Foster parents are your real parents now  
 It was just things...things can be replaced  
 Don't worry, you'll be back with your family soon  
 Don't worry you'll never see them again  
 It's been years...why are we still dealing with this  
 But we've had you since you were a baby  
 Your new family can buy you all those things  
 Just don't think about them  
 I'm sure you will make new friends

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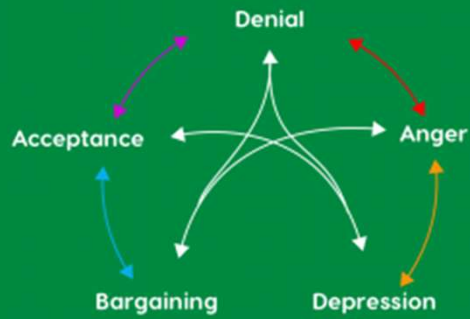
All Children in Foster Care Have Experienced Tremendous Loss



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PALLIUM INDIA

### 5 Stages of Grief



6

## Shock



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7

- Focus on safety and building trust; do this with reassuring words and setting a clear home structure.
- Engage the child slowly and respectfully, being mindful not to overwhelm them with your enthusiasm or lots of adult visitors.
- Follow the child's lead; if they want to play and not talk, allow for that.
- If they make requests for what is familiar to them, like familiar foods, do your best to accommodate the child.
- Be clear about why the child is with you and what your role is, but do not push this conversation.
- Be gentle and kind, validating that this must be hard for them and letting them know you are there to support them.
- Give the child time to work through their emotions and feelings.

8



## Anger or Protest

- Tantrums
  - Angry outbursts
- Being oppositional and hypersensitive
  - Being withdrawn
- Being grumpy and hard to please
- Being aggressive with other children
  - Breaking toys or objects
  - Lying and stealing
- Refusal to comply with direction
- Eating or sleeping disturbances
  - Mutism or refusing to talk
  - Regression in toileting

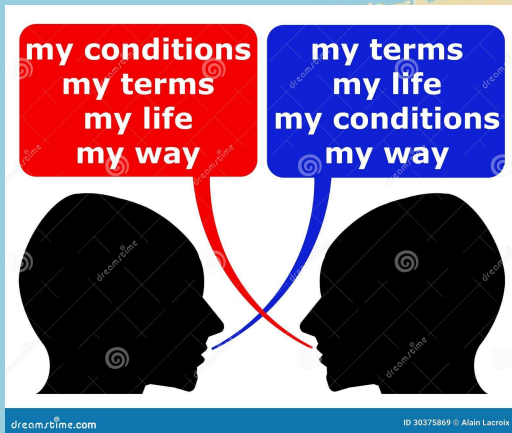


9

- Set a well-defined home structure; the parent needs to be clear, yet compassionately in charge.
- Name and validate what you think may be going on; for example, “Johnny, it makes perfect sense that you would be angry considering all that you have lost.”
- Talk about what the child may be feeling and experiencing when they seem calmer and more relaxed.
  - Provide consequences that show you’re on their side and help them to learn; say nonjudgmentally that they may not have learned these rules before, and your role is to help them learn.
- Acknowledge their losses gently out loud. They need to feel that you get it and talking about it can help if they are open to it. If not, don’t push but do validate how hard the situation must be for them.
- Be mindful of physical and emotional safety, make sure the child, you, other family members and pets, are safe at all times. This may require changing things physically in the home environment or the routine.

10

## Negotiating



- They are overly eager to please you
- They are following the rules and your directions very carefully
- They are doing the things they had not done before but now believe will look like good behavior, such as making their bed every morning or helping with household chores

11

- Redirect children to jobs that actually are theirs; for example: doing homework for school, performing chores, having fun playing, and focusing on growing up.
- Do not reinforce them too frequently for being “good”, but rather try encouraging them to spend time in free-flowing activities, like using messy paint, playing in dirt or rain, using a free pass to get out of a chore, etc.
- Remind them that you care about them regardless of how they are behaving; tell them that it’s ok not to be perfect- it can actually be good to learn how to make mistakes, especially when you learn from them!
- Help children find and practice things that give them opportunities for control and building mastery, such as cooking, playing sports, music, academics, etc.
- Give children choices in things that are safe to have power over, like choosing what’s for lunch or dinner, picking out their own clothing, making choices for entertainment, etc

12

## Deep Sadness

- Social and emotional withdrawal
  - General anxiety
- The child is easily brought to tears
- The child is easily frustrated and overwhelmed by minor stresses
  - Listlessness
- Inability to concentrate and short attention span
  - Robot-like activities
- In severe cases or in younger children, you might see head banging, rocking, or eating and sleeping disturbances



13


- Be available to the child; check on them often if they are withdrawn.
- Validate their sadness as completely understandable given all they have lost.
- Gently acknowledge their losses out loud. Consider having them write their losses down with your support or creating a poem, story, or song about them; share this with a therapist if they have one.
- Help the child create rituals for honoring their grief, such as lighting a candle on important holidays to honor losses.
- Support as you would anyone who is grieving, give extra time, kindness and comfort in your words and deeds.
- Continue to provide fun activities, but do not pressure them to be playful or light if they are not in the mood.
  - If they are comforted by touch, then this is a time for hugs, backrubs, hand holding, etc.
  - Recognize sadness at much later stages as they reach milestones that make them realize what and who they've lost, such as a wedding or birth of a child.

14

## Understanding

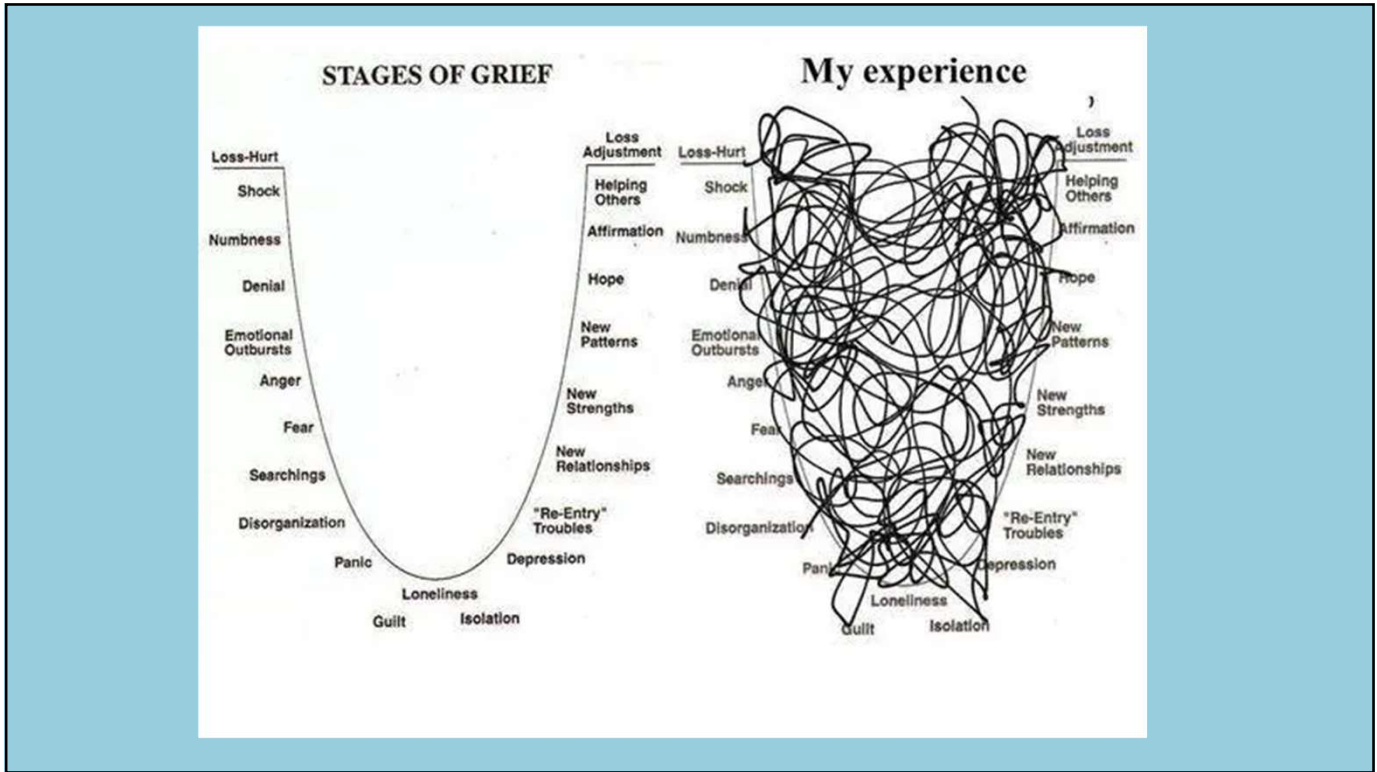
- Developing new attachments in the new family
- Finding their place in the family and feeling like they belong
- Identifying as part of the family, such as wanting to use their last name or dressing more like them
- Experiencing pleasure and fun, wanting to participate in family activities
  - An improved ability to concentrate
  - More stability in emotional responses
- Interest and participation in activities and surroundings
  - Interest in and planning for future activities

15

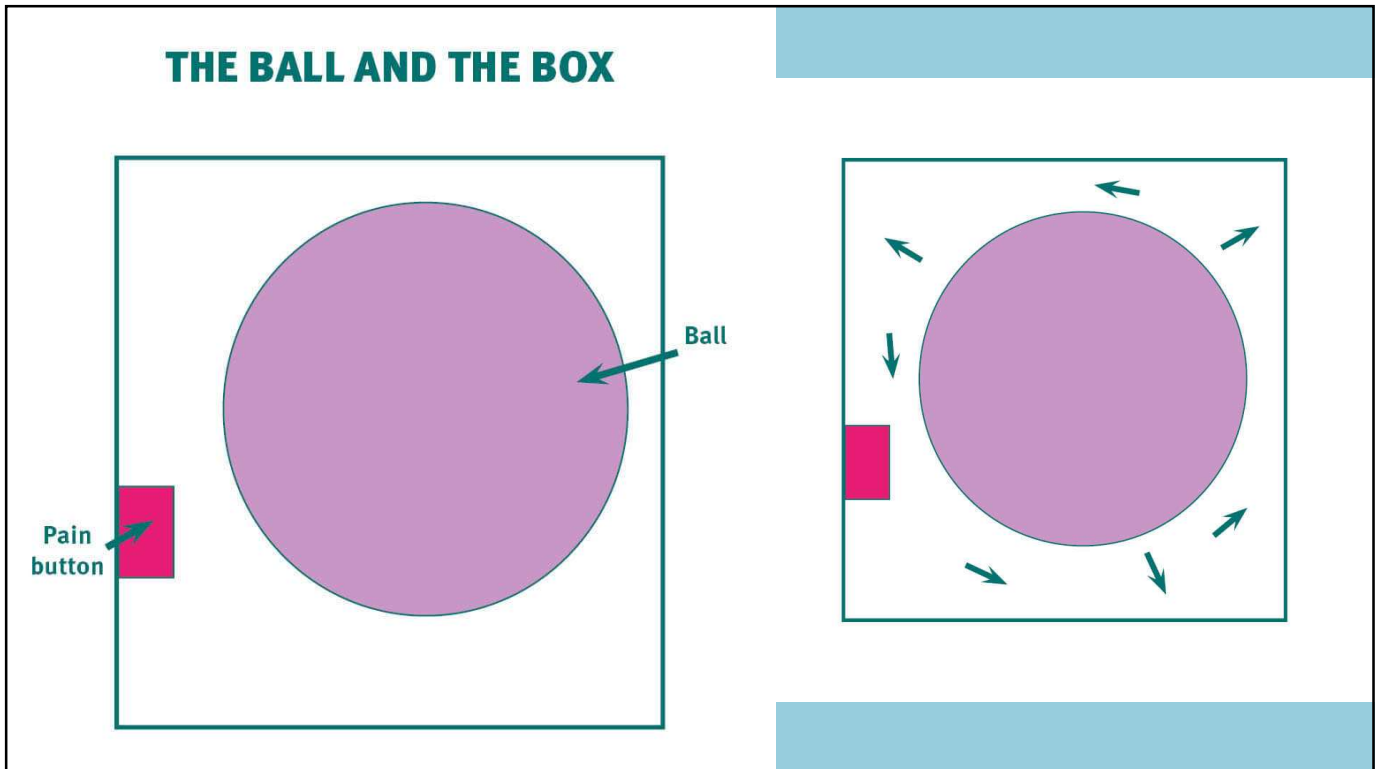
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- Spend time enjoying this period with your child while honoring the past and the emotions the child still carries from it.
  - Talk openly with the child about good times and bad, including times with all of the families they've lived with.
  - Acknowledge any longings they continue to have towards their birth family, including taking the lead in finding out more information for them when they are younger and supporting any searches they may choose to do when they are older.
    - Clarify your relationship to one another and be playful about your future together.
  - Let the child lead in how much "claiming" they choose to do of you, your family members, and your lifestyle.
    - Keep connections to people, places, and cultures of the child's origin.
    - Understand that this is not a fixed state. There may be periods, especially during life milestones, that trigger former grief responses that the person already seemed to move through at an earlier period.

16

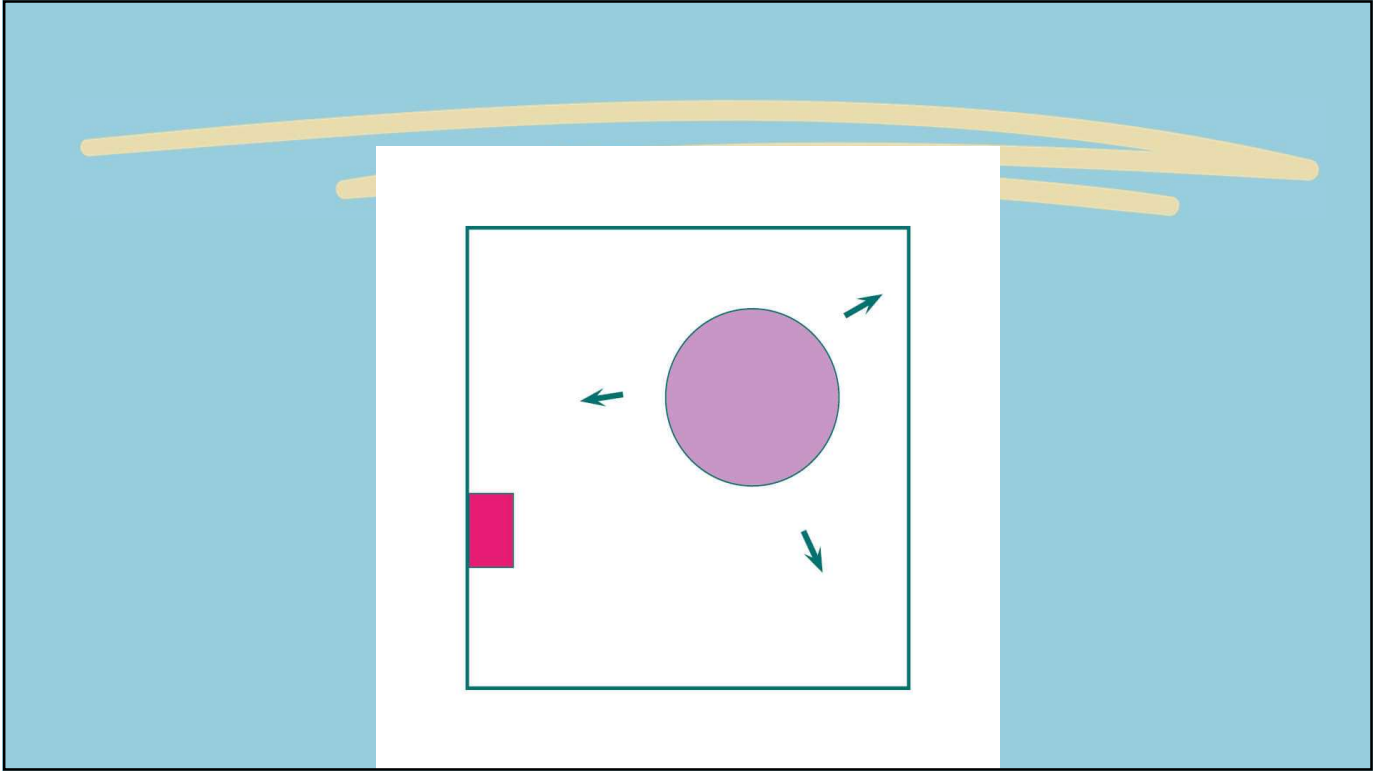




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Thank you!!

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28

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